

150hh- Valuing Sense Pleasures Makes You An Addict.

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(A Summarised Transcription From A Hillside Hermitage Dhamma Talk)

Q: You mentioned before that a person cannot get the right view without first abandoning the value of sensuality, what did you mean by that?

Nm: First one must understand that the non-performance of sensual acts is not necessarily the abandoning of sensuality. You might be celibate and abstaining from sensuality, and still not be abandoning the value of sense pleasure, which means for as long as you don't abandon the value of sense pleasures, you're preventing the necessary basis for the right view from arising, no matter how physically restrained you are.

Q: So what is the value of sensuality?

Nm: It's your gratuitous attitude towards the pleasure that you get through your senses. The sense objects and the sense organs are not a problem. Even the pleasures that arise on account of sense objects are not the problem. You valuing them, desiring them, entertaining them, protecting them, delighting in him, that's the problem. So you have to abandon the value of sense pleasure, which means you have to be willing to accept, in that universal manner, that for the rest of your life, sense pleasure is bad, not to be engaged with. As I said before, even if you fail to free yourself from sensuality entirely, you will not fail in establishing the value of the sensuality as being bad, which means whenever you fail in sustaining such acts of renunciation, you will feel guilty, you will feel ashamed. So next time, that shame will make you think twice, but it will not protect you from doing it if you never even questioned the value of sense pleasures. But if even before you start questioning it, you start defending and justifying your sensual acts, that means you're never going to uproot it even if you live celibate for the rest of your life.

You uproot sensuality by uprooting the value of pleasure, not by abstaining physically from it. Of course, abstaining physically from it is a necessary basis for you to see the value of it and then you can uproot it, but in itself, it will not automatically result in freedom.

All the sense pleasures are addictive and all addictions share that same nature of valuing pleasure.

So obviously sexuality and that kind of deeply rooted, sensual needs are the greatest of all addictions, but like any other addiction, if you abstain from it, it will become more apparent for what it is. The only reason you're not seeing your addiction is because you refuse to give it up. But if you start having reasons for giving it up, then you get to see how addicted you are. You're

never going to see how addicted to cigarettes or heroin you are until you try and quit. That's when you will feel the weight of it. So the necessary step for giving up an addiction is to give it up, stop doing it. By restraining yourself physically, your value of it will become more apparent, which means you have to accept the inevitable pain of withdrawal. That has to be the first step, and not just accept it for a week or for 10 days, you have to accept it universally- 'You don't know for how long and it doesn't matter'.

Sensuality will never be valuable, even as something that could free you from pain, which is the inherent value of sensuality. Not just that it provides you with pleasure, it provides you with the only form of escape from the pain that you know, which means even if you don't value sensual pleasures, you value sensuality as the means of escape from discomfort. And that's already wrong. That's already a problem. So, if you see through the apparent value of sensuality and see it as non-valuable, as something not to be delighted in, as something dangerous and unworthy, then you have to accept the pain that will come out of that. You kind of know that it will not last for the rest of your life but hoping that it doesn't last for the rest of your life means implicitly hoping that you can return back to sensuality. And you must never accept sensuality. Even in the most remote future.

You have to understand why you are attracted to sense pleasures. Not in a psychologising manner. "Oh, because my hormones...etc", No, why do you value the pleasures of the senses? Why can you just NOT value them? Because you never tried to not value them. You're always taking it for granted. Pleasure is always regarded as good and only when it gets a bit excessive, you say "okay, now it's a bit much", but no, you don't want your value to depend on the quantity or even quality of the pleasure. Doesn't matter if it's lofty, if it's heavenly, if it's lowly like the animal realm, doesn't matter if it's a little or a lot, a little bit of excrement, smells as bad as a truckload of it. Same with sensuality, a little bit of it, shares the same nature of the perilous danger, not worth engaging in, doesn't matter how refined.

There is no way you will be able to devalue the value of sensuality unless you are first physically withdrawn from it, unless you take on the sense restraint and the precepts. And really, we're talking about eight precepts. Five precepts are how you should live a life which separates you from an animal. Five precepts are the lowest minimum threshold for a wholesome life. But that doesn't mean you can get wisdom on account of that minimum threshold.

Q: So the value in sensuality is that it provides pleasure.

Nm: Yes, the value of sensuality is that it provides you with pleasure from the pain of itself. Sensuality touches you with pain, but at the same time, it offers you a solution for that pain. It's just like racketeering: "Okay, if you pay me, I'll make your problems go away, problems that I put on you so that you will pay me". So you get extorted by your own sensuality, your own desires. And the more you pay, the more it's going to come knocking because you're susceptible. It will bleed you dry. That's what sensuality does to you, until you draw a line for yourself and endure the pain.

The reason why addictions are hard to give up, is because you're not giving them up specifically, you're giving up the whole world you lived through them, hence the fear of restraint. Whether it's alcohol, cigarettes, drugs doesn't matter. The reason they're pleasant is because you get to experience the whole world on the basis of that substance or that addiction or that pleasure. Heroin is not pleasant in itself, but experiencing the world through heroin is where that pleasure comes from. That blissful, undisturbed peace that people will be addicted to, is defined by the experience of the world on account of it. That's why you literally lose any interest in the world. Because you stop feeling anything in regards to it, which is what we all want to do from the start. Everybody wants peace. Everybody wants non-disturbance. And now you found a substance that provides you with utmost pleasure, whereby nothing can disturb you for as long as a substance lasts, but that non-disturbance gets defined by the disturbance that circumstantially doesn't disturb you anymore.

Your senses stop disturbing you if you're high on certain drugs. And that's why it gets so painful, the withdrawal from those sense pleasures, because you're withdrawing from the only world you know, so more often than not, such withdrawal will feel like dying. Same with cigarettes by the way. You smoke a cigarette, you are literally inhaling the whole world through it, as Sartre described in his book, and it's absolutely true, everything that you've been doing, you've been doing on the basis of the possibility of that pleasure.

Imagine now, you want to abandon sexual pleasure, which is far more rooted than heroin or any other drug you can be addicted to. You will need to have a pretty strong reason for abandoning it. Otherwise, there's no way you'll succeed. However, even if you don't succeed in doing it, you must not dilute the reasons for doing it, because if you do that, for sure, you will not succeed. If you start devaluing the 'NON-value of sensuality' means you're automatically valuing sensuality. So if you say, "no, I don't need to be restrained. And I can practice Dhamma at the same time", means you're saying "I don't need to abandon the value of sensuality, and at the same time, I can practice Dhamma. But what is Dhamma? Well, Dhamma is the dispassion and freedom from sensuality". So you're saying you do not need to devalue sensuality and by not devaluing it, you are devaluing it. That's a plain contradiction, and that's what the Buddha said, even to people who are not necessarily following his teachings, when they asked him what criteria should they use for good or bad, he said whatever practice leads to dispassion, disenchantment, abandoning, renunciation, you should value it, you should do it. So which practice leads to dispassion? Celibacy or non-celibacy? Sense restraint or non-sense restraint? which one leads to disenchantment? Well, the answer is straightforward.

Now, you can say "yeah, but it's too much for me", okay, that's fine, you admit that you are too weak, and that's the necessary basis for developing strength - recognizing your weakness. But if you say "No, I don't need to be restrained". That's it. You have just thrown away the whole thing and now you will stay weak. Same when people say "I can give up smoking whenever I want", But they can't WANT to give up smoking whenever they want. And without wanting to give up smoking without removing the value of smoking, you will never give it up.

Q: Some say that they can give up their addiction if they can find a replacement.

Nm: Which means that they need something to replace the vacuum left by removing the content of that which they value, which means they will never devalue it. You just replace it. You replace one addiction with the other. You're still addicted.

Q: Maybe if I replaced my addiction with a more refined or subtle one. So instead of drugs, I turn to devotion to precepts and so on.

Nm: See, that's fine. As long as you don't ignore the value of your addiction at the expense of it. In other words, yes, let me replace my non-precept keeping with five precepts, it's still better. But let me not develop the view that five precepts will be enough for me to devalue my addiction because it's not. If you don't develop that view, then it's fine. Then you can refine your five precepts on to eight precepts and so on. The common thread through all of that is, you wanting to be free from the value of sensuality. But if you replace your non-precepts with the five precepts and say, "That's it, see, I am now fully accomplished in restraint " means, now you mask the fact that there is still a lot more to be done in order to uproot the value sensuality. So yes, you can replace your addiction with precepts or something else that is on the side of wholesome. But don't entertain the notion that you are free from addiction.